United Nations E/CN.5/2019/NGO/26

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 November 2018

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-seventh session
11-21 February 2019
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by New Humanity, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-18378 (E) 091118

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Statement

Benefits to Social Inclusion Derived from Italy's Fiscal Policy and Laws Governing Social Cooperatives

In 1991, Italy passed a law (381/1991) governing social cooperatives that reoriented the purpose of the cooperative from favoring the mutual benefit of the cooperatives' members to having the primary benefit of serving members of the local communities. The law states its purpose as "to pursue the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social integration of citizens". (I.381) Through legal means and financial incentives, Italy has stimulated the growth of social cooperatives. The Robert Tassano Consortium and the Foco Social Cooperative formed by members of New Humanity represent two examples of how social and fiscal policies stimulate private citizens to act for the public good and benefit people living in vulnerable situations.

Law 381/1991 defined two types of social cooperatives, Type A and Type B. Type A cooperatives can provide healthcare, elder care, and education. Type B cooperatives create employment for certain vulnerable groups: physically or mentally handicapped, psychiatric patients, drug addicts, alcoholics, youth from troubled families," and prisoners in work-release programs, all of whom must represent at least 30% of the workforce. In 2005, Italy expanded the applicability of the law to include additional fields of business activity called fields of social utility.

A 1986 survey identified 500 social cooperatives serving 35,000 people. By 1996, Italy had 3,000 active social cooperatives with 100,000 members serving 400,000 people. In 1996, social cooperatives comprised 4 percent of the broader Italian cooperative sector and provided employment to 10 percent of persons in the cooperative sector. A 2005 study reported 7,300 social cooperatives employing 244,000 members and by 2015, 12,000 social cooperatives employed approximately 300,000 workers.

Benefits

Founded in 1989, by 2016, Tassano Consortium consisted 33 cooperatives employing 700 people after having employed as many as 1,200. The community benefits from the Tassano Consortium through Tassano Cooperative's ability to create jobs for vulnerable persons to prepare them to work in private sector jobs. Workers can continue working within the consortium as long as they want. If a new job does not work out, they can always come back to work within the consortium until another opportunity arises. By providing a productive job in a protected, loving environment Tassano helps to restore self-confidence to persons who have been marginalized from society.

Another Type A organization under Italy's law 381/1991 on social entrepreneurship founded by members of New Humanity, Foco serves the immigrant community, especially asylum seekers, refugees, and unaccompanied minors, with psycho-social counseling, medical and legal guidance, professional training, linguistic support and cultural mediation, literacy training, social and professional integration and the development of an individualized socio-economic plan. They provide community planning, research on regional, national and European social issues, proposal writing, the creation of partnership networks among service providers, and project management. They comply with the principles spelled out in the United Nations charter and the spirit of the Economy of Communion project that promotes universal fraternity through the pursuit of human rights, subsidiarity, and solidarity. Under another Italian law, young people between the ages of 19 and 29 can apply for permission to work with Foco as an alternative to military service.

The Tassano Consortium and Foco entrepreneurs represent two examples of an emerging network of businesses describing themselves as part of an economy of communion. Like all the 800 businesses and organizations in this network, the entrepreneurs of the Tassano Consortium and Foco gain personal satisfaction by creating a culture of giving rather than a culture of having. "Teaching people to fish" does not necessarily teach the value of work or a work ethic. Fishing together and building relationships of reciprocity and fraternity has more lasting results. At Tassano, workers participate in the decisions and in their implementation and this helps to build a sense of family. Through servant leadership, Tassano has built an atmosphere of fraternity with the workers, and with colleagues in government, business, the community, and with the managers.

Foco's program takes a participatory and collaborative approach that actively engages the people of local host communities with the migrants helping them to develop an appreciation for each another. Families have the potential for listening, welcoming, and social interaction that improves the relational skills of all involved. Companies have the capability to transfer technical knowledge and to provide work that leads to economic autonomy for the beneficiaries who offer their knowledge and skills in return. These multidisciplinary and multi-level activities create "intercultural" value that serves as a model of cultural diversity management based on the dignity of each human person in recognition of our common humanity. The migrants progress towards full autonomy and full socio-economic inclusion.

These and other social cooperatives benefit the state by reducing the cost of providing services because social cooperatives usually can provide services at a lower cost. The success of social cooperatives often depends largely on contracts from state, regional, and local governments. This means that for social cooperatives to remain viable, they must offer services that correspond to the current and future needs of the government.

Conclusion

The entrepreneurs of the Tassano Consortium, the Foco Social Cooperative and others like them seek to build relationships of fraternity and reciprocity with all whom they meet in the course of carrying out their business. Support from government agencies following passage of the laws on social cooperatives has enhanced their ability to contribute towards a more united world for the benefit of the people in their community, particularly the most vulnerable among them. Cooperation between Italian social cooperatives and local, regional, and national governments in Italy provide a model worth considering for other countries that seek to benefit from public-private partnerships.